

# TE 250: Week 6 Customer Interviews

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# Technology Entrepreneur Center

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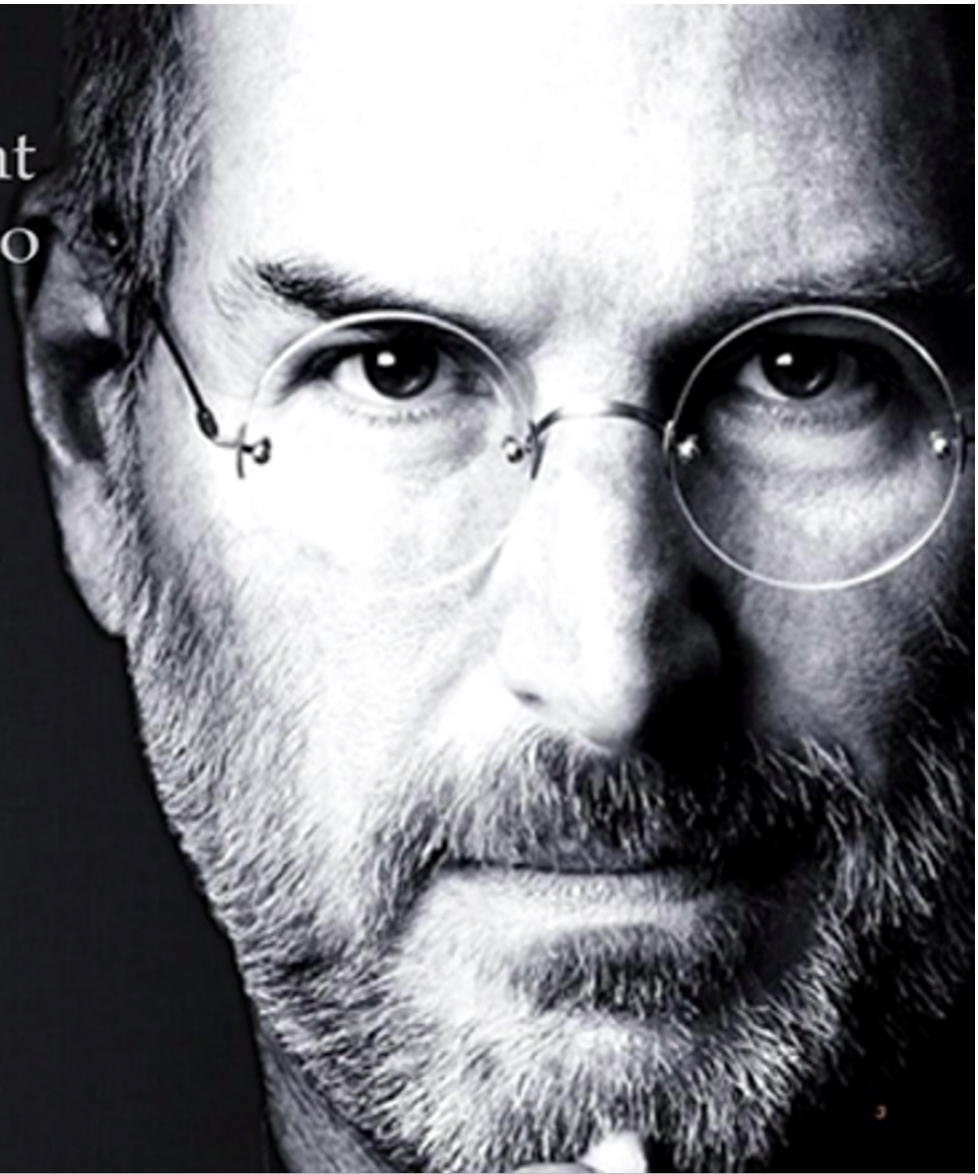
# Homework exemplars

# Customer Interviews



“You can’t just ask  
customers what they want  
and then try to give that to  
them.”

“New ideas come from  
observing something,  
listening to people,  
experimenting,  
asking questions  
and getting out of  
the building!”



The picture can't be displayed.

# Goal of customer interviews

- Understand the problem/opportunity – the REAL one
- Not asking customer to design product
- Be open to being surprised

# Why Do Interviews?

- Allows us to **Learn Fast**...current assumptions are WRONG
- Allows us to **test value** and whether a **problem is really a problem**
- Builds **deeper empathy** with the customer
- Creates **shared understanding** across the team
- Tells us the “**why**” behind customer **behavior**
- Sparks **big insights** and mental leaps

So, what about *MY* technology?

**NOBODY CARES**



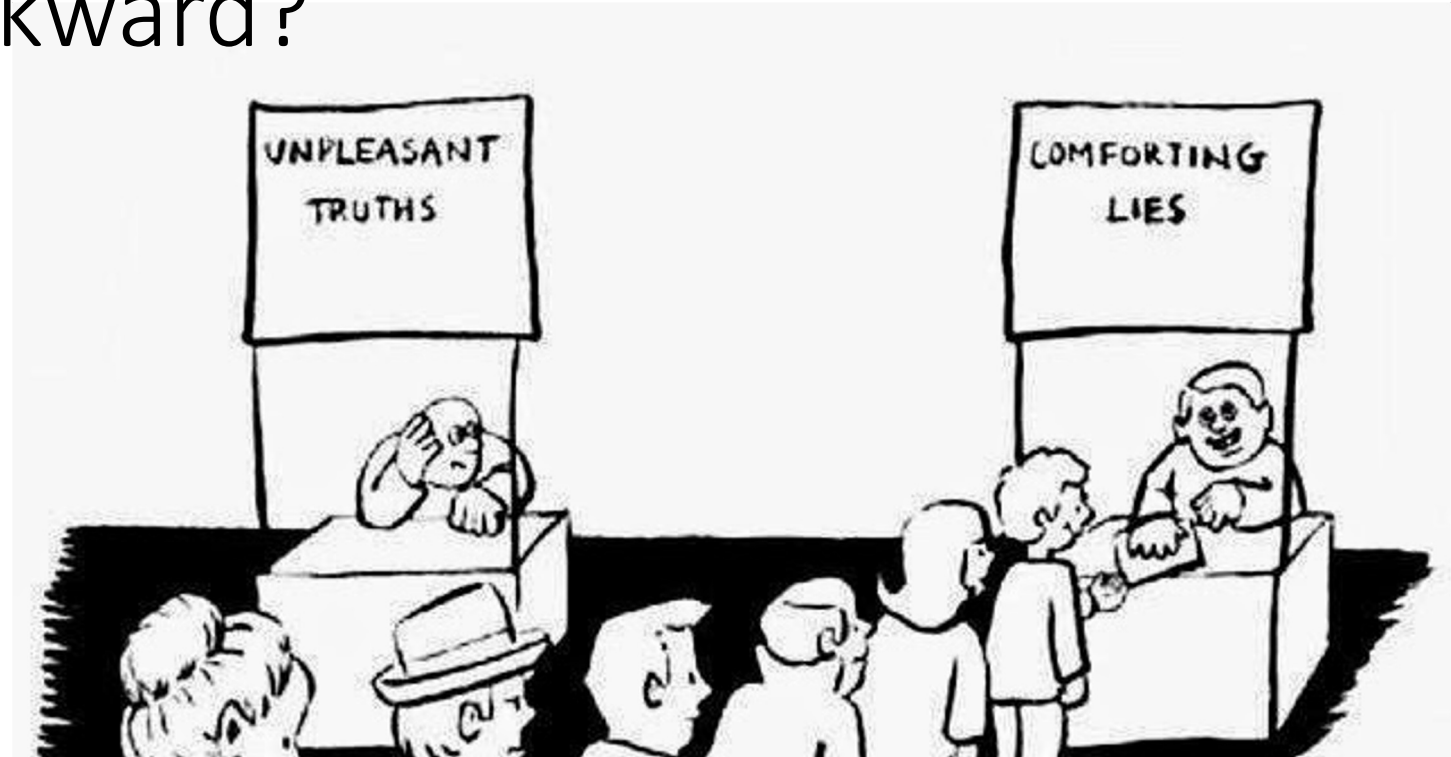
They only care about  
what it can do for *THEM*.





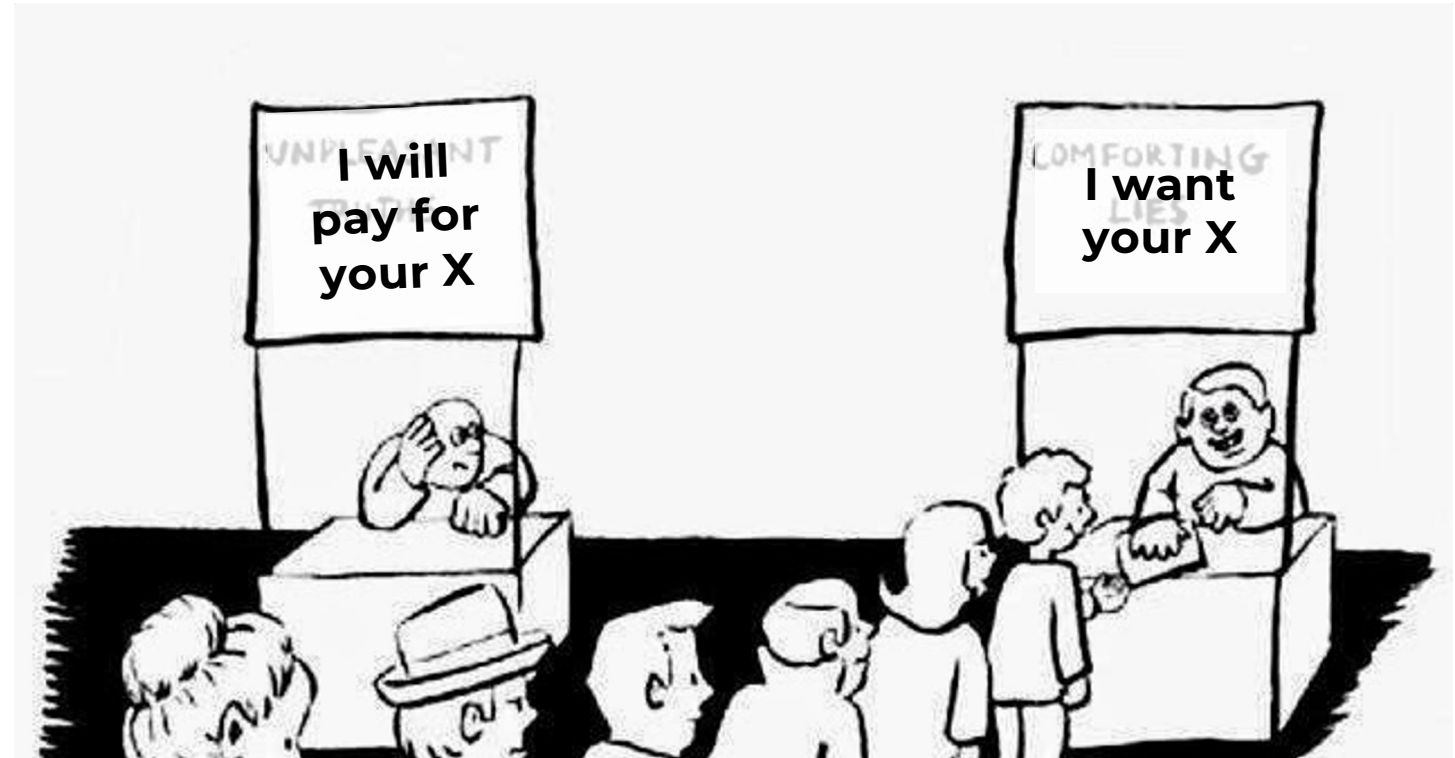
**Your business idea  
needs to **solve a problem**  
your potential customer  
will **PAY** for.**

Why endure the awkward?



**Hypotheses -> Facts**

GET OUT OF Your  
Comfort Zone!!  
Talk to People...  
*you Don't Know*



**Hypotheses -> Facts**

# Who is a Customer/Stakeholder?



**ANYONE** who appears on any of the workflows, decision trees, or value chain maps that could be involved in the business in any way.

You must talk to them all! **I** ILLINOIS

# The Process: Scientific Method for Customer Discovery

- Hypothesize

*Guess*

- Test – Interviews

*Ask*

- Assess & Analyze

*Listen*

- Adjust – Pivot

*Guess Again*



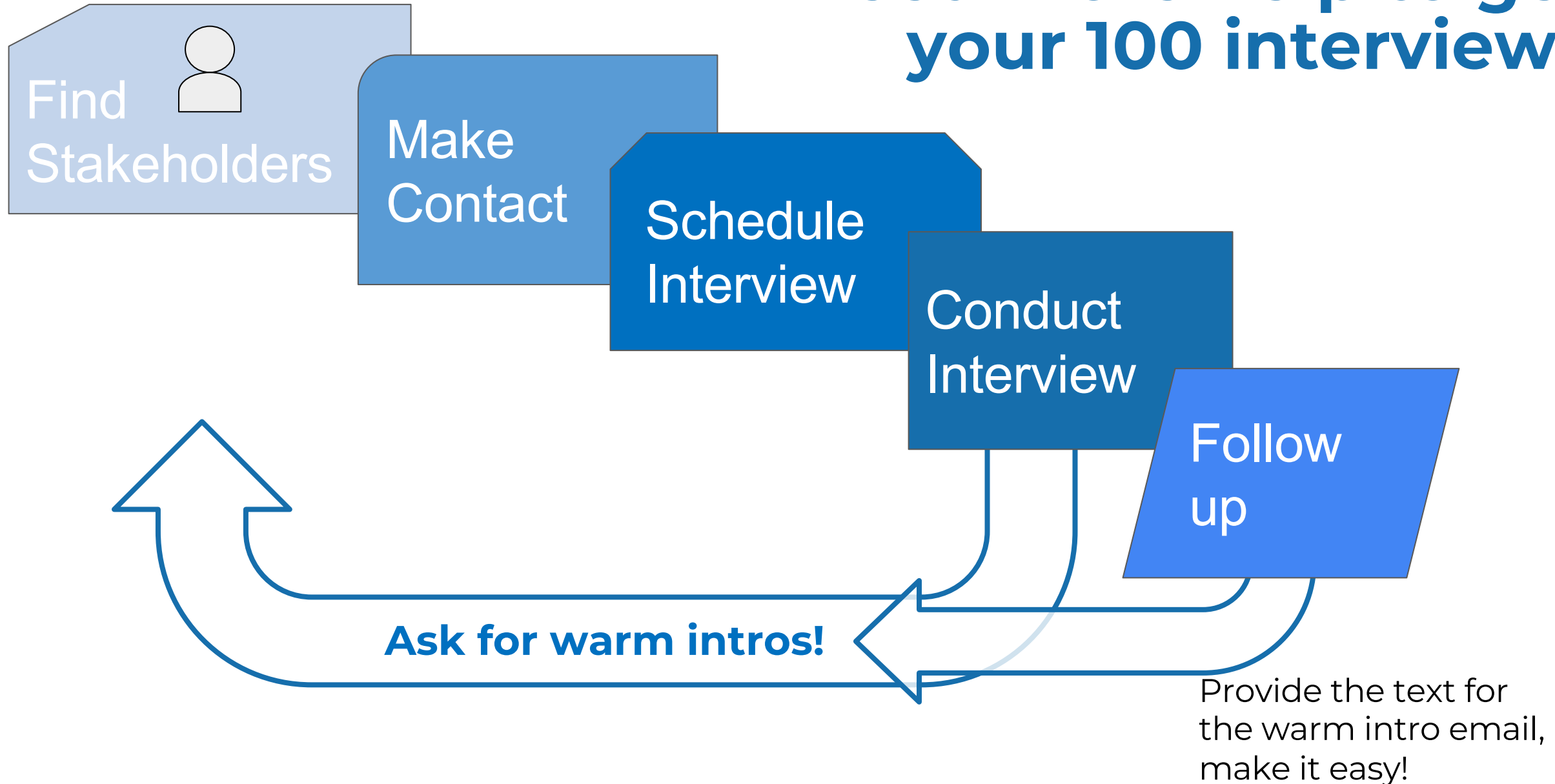
# The Interview Life-Cycle Process



# Steps

- **Find stakeholders** – who do you know?
- **Get the interview** – play student card
- **Prep/Execute** – plan ahead, be polite
- **Wrap up** – say thank you, ask permission
- **Analyze** – document/synthesize immediately

# So you've realized you probably need more help to get your 100 interviews



**How do you find  
stakeholders?**

**Most successful...  
GO where they GO**

**GET OUT of the building**



Surveys  
Questionnaires?



**NO !**

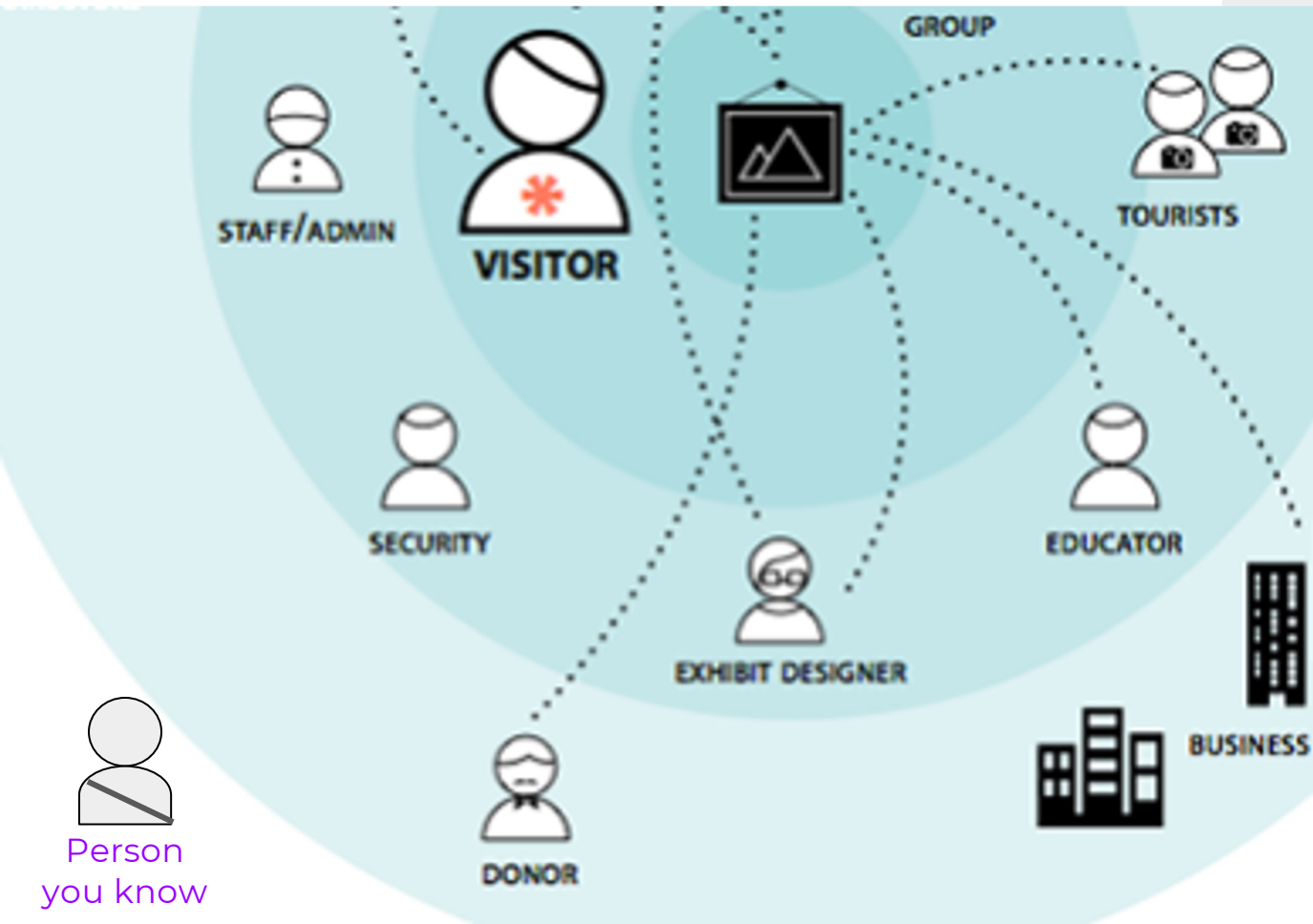
# How do you find stakeholders for B2C?

Start with people you know  
(even if they're not quite the right fit)

- Use the power of your current networks
- Review profiles and activity indicators on social media
- Don't waste your time, don't waste their time

**Then...**

- Ask them to give you a **warm intro**-be persistent, but considerate



# How do you find stakeholders for B2B?

## Networking



Search and grow your personal network on LinkedIn

- Develop a profile and establish a personal brand
  - [Build Your Brand on LinkedIn - Bing video](#)
- Find an individual within a specific company
  - What level? Mid-Level?
  - Review current company updates and information
  - Look for groups they belong to and search groups for others
    - Search your alumni networks
- LinkedIn tips from Katy Miller, New England I-Corps Node  
<https://youtu.be/UewkdYcnTSg>

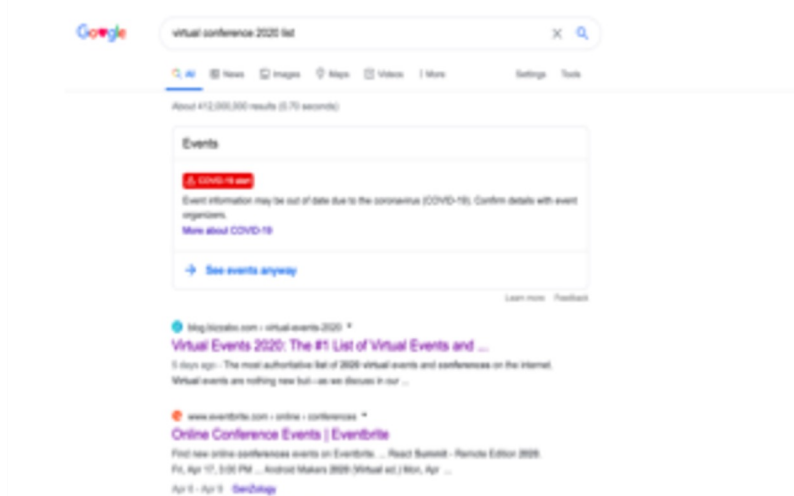


Is LinkedIn it?



# How do you find B2B stakeholders?

## Exploring the Internet

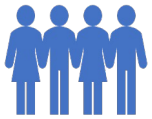


- Keyword + title (consultant, engineer)
- Keyword + conference (power electronics conference)
- Professional and trade associations (IEEE, ACS)
- Standards, regulatory organizations (ASTM, FCC)
- Trade shows/conferences-find speakers, panelists, vendors, attendee lists
- Trade journals, magazine newsletters
- White papers/academic papers
- Industry bloggers/lobbyists
- Equipment suppliers, distributor, service experts
- Check out websites of competitors
  - Highlight satisfied customers?
  - What keywords and phrases they use?
  - What features, benefits do they mention?
  - To what groups/associations do they belong?

# How do I make contact for B2B?

- Initially target number 2,3... ranked companies
- Target mid-level management, professionals
- Email, then call
- Cold call (research your target contact)
- Ask for 15-20 min (plan on 30-60 min)
- Play the “student” or “researcher” card
- Remind people you are looking for insights and help
- Network (ask for a warm intro)

# Getting the Interview: Warm Introductions B2C and B2B



An introduction from someone you know



Offer to share what you've learned about technology, market or industry



Know the benefits you will bring and have both a written and verbal list of benefits ready



Rehearse



Use something you learned from your research (LinkedIn, Web, etc.) about the person to establish a connection and build rapport

# Outreach Suggested Format

Brief intro to you

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How you know them / how you are connected

---

The topic you are interested in / problem you are looking to solve

---

What you want from them

---

Call to action

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## Outreach Suggested Format

“I am a student at the University of Illinois”

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“William recommended that I speak with you”

---

“I am exploring new methods for predicting cardiac events.”

---

“I would love to hear your perspective on post surgical monitoring.”

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“Would you have 20-30 minutes to spare next week when we could connect over Zoom? Feel free to select a time [here](#).”

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# Getting the Interview:

## Phone

- Always leave a voicemail
  - Example: I missed you and will follow up with an email with some interesting information
- Talk to the B2B gatekeeper – Ask for an email address or a better time to call
- Call first thing in the morning or late in the afternoon
- Never underestimate flattery
- Name dropping can work if done artfully
- Phone in conjunction with email can be very effective

# What are some suggestions for getting interviews?

- Consider being
  - direct
  - thoughtful
  - interesting
  - clear with your ask
  - succinct
  - confident
  - kind
  - conscientious  
(check for errors in emails)
- Refrain from
  - being too formal
  - asking people to do things on your behalf
  - **being too salesy**
  - being aggressive
  - begging

Play the U of I student card!

# Before the Interview



**Have at least one hypothesis to test**

**Know what questions can help get you there**



**Research your interview subject**



**Have a process, have a plan**

# Conducting Interviews

**Why are we talking to customers?**

- **Listening is not waiting to talk**
- Learn things you don't know
- Discover and understand
  - What is important to them
  - How "it" gets done
- Test your assumptions and hypotheses
  - Helps you stay focused

# Formulating Interview *Questions*

- What do you want to learn from the person?
- What are your incoming hypotheses that you will test?
- What is the role of person in the ecosystem?
  - user, decision maker, other?
- What is the stage of discovery and purpose?
  - Start broad, narrow in

# Problem Interviews

## Example questions

### **Pains:**

- What frustrates them?
- What are their biggest risks?
- What problems keep them up at night?
- What is getting in the way of what they want/need to do?
- What takes up the most time for the least value?
- What part of the process do they wish they could eliminate?

### **Gains:**

- What are their top goals?
- How is success measured?
- What have they tried or adopted previously that paid off?
- What trends are they seeing that they hope to be a part of?
- What is their competitor doing well that they wish they could mimic?



# Key Takeaways



Focus on current practices

Do NOT ask them to make predictions



Try to understand current trends



Ask about specific pains/gains they would like to relieve/achieve

*This is the key point of the interview!*



Try to understand the purchase process

What drives purchase decisions?  
Who influences, decides, purchases?  
What are lead times?

**Tell me a story:**

**Ask about history**

**Background**

**Experiences**

**Examples**

**Processes**

# Some questions *to get you started*

- What are the top three-to-five *jobs* you are trying to do?
- If you could improve just one job, what would it be? Why?
- What are you *currently doing* to meet objectives for that job?
- How *satisfied* are you with your current solution?
- Have you *ever considered* alternative solutions?
- *What keeps you up at night...?*
- *If you could wave a magic wand...?*

# Wrapping Up Interviews

## Good Interviews

- “Is there anything else I should have asked you about?”
- “Is there anyone else you think I should talk to you?”
- “If I have additional questions may I call you again?”

## Bad Interviews

- “Thank you very much, you’ve answered my questions”
- “I want to respect your time.”

# Problem Interviews: Example

## **Assumptions:**

1. Price is the most important factor when selecting medical supplies.

## **Interview Questions:**

1. Tell me about a time when you were reviewing a request for new supplies. What was the driving factor in your decision making process?
2. What other factors were at play at the time?
3. Who else was involved in the decision making?

# Conducting Interviews

- Introduction
  - Introduce yourself and your team
  - Thank them for taking time to meet you
- Frame the Conversation
  - Remind them why you are seeking insights and help
  - Once framed, try to get them to tell a story





## Interview Best Practices (Video/Live)

- Try to have 2 of your team present  
(notetaker/questioner)
- Use 1 web camera
- No recording
- Quiet location
- Headset if audio is compromised
- Dress professionally
- Thank them within a day  
(email...)



# In Summary

# General *Best Practices*

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- Have a “warm-up”/prelude
  - *Get to know the person*
- Ask open-ended questions
  - *Avoid yes/no or multiple choice.*
  - *Listen for unknown unknowns*
- Ask process, actions & present/past behaviors
  - *Ask who/what/why/how questions.*
  - *Avoid is/are/would/should/do you think – no opinions/speculation*
- Adopt a beginner’s mindset
  - *Listen with a “fresh pair of ears.”*
- Listen more than you talk
  - *You are there to learn.*
  - *Don’t sell.*

# General *Best Practices*

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- Get facts, not opinions
  - NOT, “Would you...?” BUT, “When is the last time you...?”
  - Focus on what they do...not what they say
- Dive deep(er)
  - Ask “why” x3 to get real motivations.
- Follow-up
  - Ask for permission to contact interviewee’s again later.
- Open doors at the end
  - Ask, “Who else should I talk to?”
  - “What else should I have asked that I didn’t?”

# Common *Pitfalls*

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- Stick to a process
  - Have a process to follow – don't just "talk to people."
  - Remove variables in conversation to allow comparison
  - Be flexible though, your interviewee knows the market better than you
- Do NOT sell...anything, ever
  - *The goal of discovery interviews is learning, not selling*
  - Don't ever ask, "Would you buy our solution?"
  - Ask, "What are your decision criteria?"
- Don't mention solutions
  - *Avoid the temptation to talk technology!*
  - *Do NOT demo.* It's not about your solution, it's about their problem.

# Common *Biases*

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- Leading the Witness
  - Walking them down the path to your solution.
  - Allow them to define their needs/wants.
- Avoid the Other 3 Biases
  - **Confirmation bias**- look for the ugly baby
  - **Sample bias**- Sample too narrow or wrong target
  - **Social bias**- go outside of your immediate network, but do leverage them for warm connections

# Common Mistakes

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- Lack a plan/process
- Execute process with excellence
- Biases

Confirmation, selection, social acceptability, winners, other?

- Perceived vs. Real Value
- Believe what is said
- Go quantitative too soon

# Additional Resources

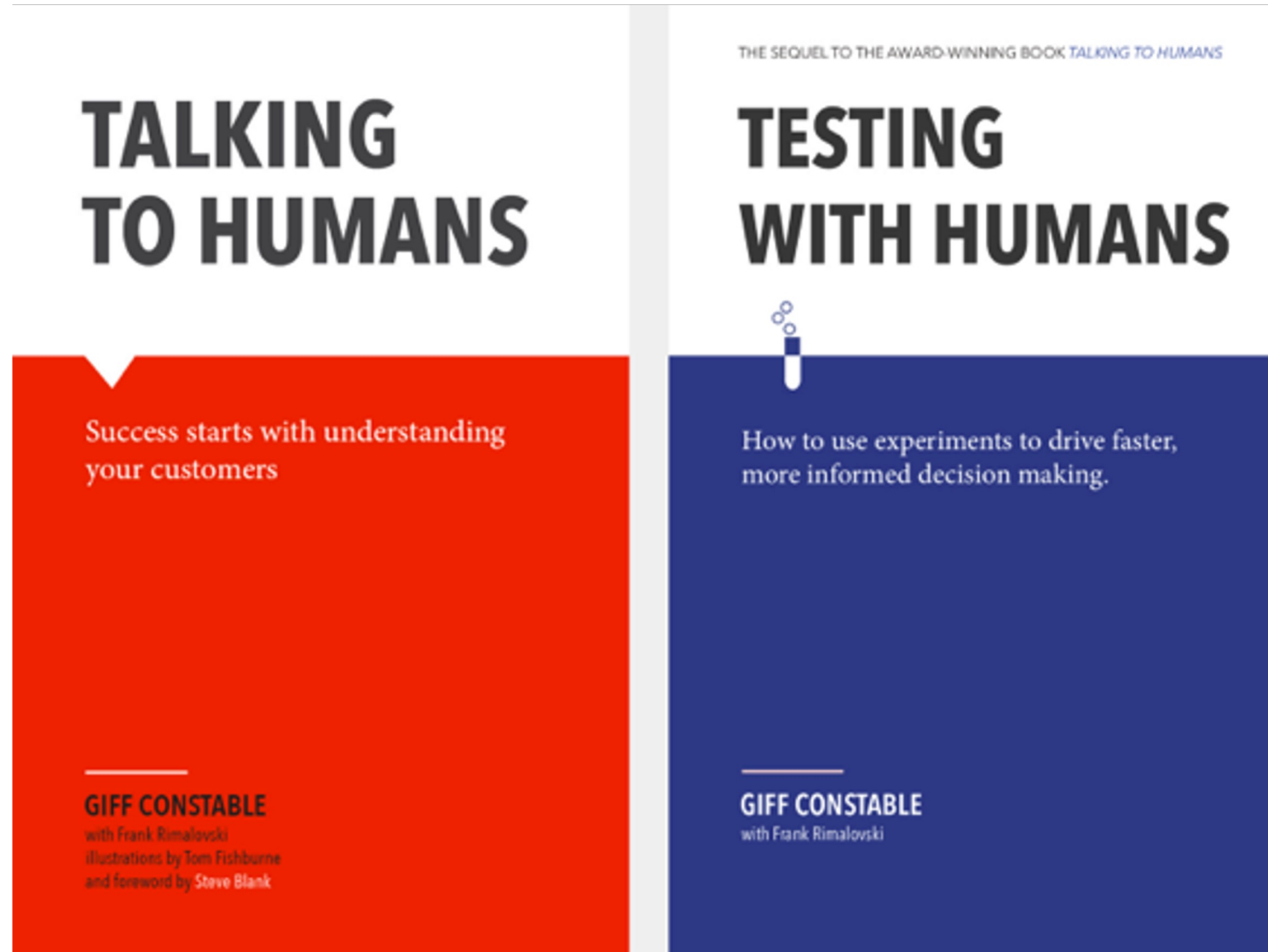
## Customer Interview Script Generator:

- <http://customerdevlabs.com/script/>

A handful of short video clips from Steve Blank for Customer Development interviews can be found at:

- <http://vimeo.com/groups/204136/videos/page:1/sort:alphabeCcal/format:thumbnail>
- <http://startupweekend.wistia.com/projects/zt618zz0r7>

# Resources





I'VE BEEN TOLD I NEED TO GET  
CANDID, UNBIASED FEEDBACK  
ON MY STARTUP IDEA.

WE LOVE THIS  
IDEA AND WE'RE  
SO PROUD OF  
YOU, SON.



*Relax, it's just a conversation.*

Good / Bad Question

Let's judge some interview questions!

## Good / Bad Question

What is the biggest issue you face dealing with activity 'x'?

## Good / Bad Question

What is the biggest issue you face dealing with activity 'x'?

**Good  
Question**

Good / Bad Question

Would you buy a product that  
did 'X'?

## Good / Bad Question

Would you buy a product that  
did 'X'?



**Bad  
Question**

## Good / Bad Question

What are the implications of not solving problem 'X'?



# Good / Bad Question

What are the implications of not solving problem 'X'?



Good  
Question

Good / Bad Question

How do you deal with  
issue 'X' today?

Good / Bad Question

How do you deal with  
issue 'X' today?

Good  
Question

Good / Bad Question

What solutions have you tried  
in the past?

## Good / Bad Question

What solutions have you tried  
in the past?

Good  
Question

Good / Bad Question

Would you pay \$Z for a solution  
that did 'X'?

Good / Bad Question

Would you pay \$Z for a solution  
that did 'X'?

**Bad  
Question**

Good / Bad Question

Where does the budget come from to deal with Issue 'X'?



Good / Bad Question

Where does the budget come from to deal with Issue 'X'?

Good  
Question

Good / Bad Question

What do you think about (insert sales pitch here)?

## Good / Bad Question

What do you think about  
(insert sales pitch here)?

**Bad  
Question**

**Bad  
Question**

**Bad  
Question**

Relax,  
it's just a conversation.

# Getting ready for Week 7

- Customer Interview Plan first draft – INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENT
- Reading/watching assignment is same as Week 6 – this means you have time to finish the “Talking to Humans” book :-)
- Week 7 will cover documenting customer interviews
  - Team breakout to begin combining individual Customer Interview Plans

Guest Speaker: Ashley Moy  
Chief Executive Officer – Cast21

# Ashley Moy, Cast21

- BS Bioengineering UIUC
- CEO Cast21
  - Waterproof cast and brace alternatives for patients with broken bones

